



Invitation to Lent

A Spirituality of Resistance

A Formational Resource for the Lenten Season
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Community of Christ

What do we really need? What matters most?
How are you experiencing the invitation of LESS, LESS, LESS?

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. –Matthew 13:44, NRSV

In the madness of keeping up, a gentler invitation has entered our hearts, revealing the depth of our attachments to status and things. It whispers, “less, less, less”—echoing in the cavernous soul, trembling the foundations of this life we’ve made thus far.

What is small and quiet can become most mighty. Such is the way of Christ. Just one thought planted, proposing an alternative way, screeches to a halt the illusions of success, casting light on the hidden motivations for our money and time. We gasp at how subtle and impactful the neglect of our deepest values can be. We barely remember how, along the way, we traded in these values for a dream that was never truly ours.

What do we really need? What does matter most? Sacred conversations with courageous souls, unwilling to live in the wearying status quo, spark conviction in us anew. We, too, can choose a simpler way—discerning for ourselves what is necessary and what is abundance. Liberation from materialism beckons, release from the incessant cultural chant of “more, more, more.” Sometimes we share stories to share courage. I am grateful for the handfuls of fresh courage we have received.



A Spirituality of Resistance: Jesus in the Desert

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"

Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"

Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

—Luke 4:1-12, NRSV

**Break free of the shackles of
conventional culture that mainly
promote self-serving interests.**

Doctrine and Covenants Section 163

THE PRACTICE OF SPIRITUAL FREEDOM

We wear many lenses as we seek God's direction for our lives. These lenses include cultural norms, religious traditions, political and ideological preferences, and socio-economic status. We are invited to honestly examine the ways our lenses sometimes restrict faithful response. In Doctrine and Covenants Section 163:9a, we are reminded to "break free of the shackles of conventional culture that mainly promote self-serving interests." Through the practice of spiritual freedom, we intentionally make space within to respond freely and faithfully, even when that response disrupts the status quo and invites us into transformation.

During the season of Lent, we dwell deeply in this practice in the pattern of the story of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. Over and over, he was offered seemingly good things that might satisfy hunger and ego but resisted each one as he continued to seek God's call. **Jesus in the wilderness models a posture of radical availability to God.**

We are not strangers to the ways temptations can come in subtle forms and offer seemingly good things. It takes practice to remember that not every convenient or satisfying option is the best one. The Lenten journey invites us into a spirituality of resistance. It is a time to sort through our priorities and agendas and release our attachments to what doesn't bring fullest life for ourselves, others, and creation.

It is a sacred risk to challenge the cultural norms and trends we are immersed in and to confront the systems we have come to

rely on. This can happen in large ways, but also in the details of our daily lives as we make simple, yet consequential choices about what we will consume, how we will behave, and how we perceive the world around us. Spiritual freedom is an active, alert, attentive posture of openness to the Spirit in every condition and circumstance.

It is my prayer that this Lenten season will be an opportunity to redirect our hearts toward God as the source of all we are and do. May we be blessed with the wisdom and courage of the wilderness Jesus as we discern when to resist and when to embrace in all the moments of our lives.

Prayer Phrase

God, may my deep hope align with your deep vision. Release in me anything that keeps me from freely following your Spirit. Amen.

Invitation to Spiritual Practice

Breathe deeply as you enter a time of silence. Become gently attentive to what may be restricting you from faithfully responding to the divine invitation in your life. Are there priorities, attachments, tasks, or motivations competing for your response? What does freedom for God look or feel like in you this day?



Let me take it upon myself to speak to the Lord, I who am
but dust and ashes.

—Genesis 18:27, NRSV

Holiness lives where awe and humility meet.

We remind each other at the beginning of Lent, “you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” (Genesis 3:19) It may sound like doom and gloom, but the point is far from self-deprecation.

“You are dust” triggers memory for ancient hearers of the creation story where God breathed life into the very dust of the earth, from which we came. (Genesis 2:7) Being dust is not a bad thing. It is the reality of our profound identity as member of a complex, interconnected family of creation. We are reminded that our very bones and muscles, flesh and breath come out of and are sustained by the earth, which is sacred. We are made of what is ancient. Every particle we consume has a lineage of life beyond our imagining. Consuming it, it becomes part of us. The air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat, has passed through countless life forms throughout history. To consider the cosmic origins of the dust we are is even more breathtaking.

How could we ever have thought we were in this alone? On Ash Wednesday, we smudge the material stuff of earth upon our flesh and reaffirm our place within it.

It would be inauthentic to this text to simply dwell in the blessing of dust when these words to our ancestors sounded more like a curse, “... and to dust you shall return.” Just as we revel in the profound relatedness inherent in our dust-being, we are reminded of the profound consequence of living in denial of that relatedness. This consequence is not punishment. It is not meant to shame or place blame. When our lives are so radically and inextricably connected, everything has impact on the whole. The humble

way of Lent invites us to restoration and reconciliation that begins with an acknowledgement of the ways we have walked upon the dust forgetting we are part of it.

If we could remember that our lives are holy connected beyond what we can know, perhaps the fear and anxiety of this time would dissipate into awe. Humility may be the way to the redemption of the world.

With the ashes, we face the reality and inevitability of mortality with reverence. We remember just how fragile and fleeting life is. We ponder the source from which we came and seek to realign our lives more closely toward it. We allow ourselves to be captured by what is immense, to find surprising solace in what we cannot control or explain, to be saved by our smallness.

We confess what is broken because we yearn to be whole. This is less about a God who needs our confession, and more about humanity that needs to rekindle an awareness of what is truly sacred. God’s breath into the dust of our lives means that we are made of dust divine—ashes to ashes, dust to dust. From where we come we will return.

How is the season of Lent an invitation to both humility and awe?

*How have you forgotten, or neglected your connection with others?
How are you called to live that connection more fully?*

Almost Surrender

For a time I came close
To the great void
The cave of unknowing
Deep in my soul
Where divine mystery dwells.

I found the entrance,
Gasping in disbelief.

I peered inside the darkness
For as long as I could bear
And then turned away-
Not yet ready to step inside,
Afraid I may never come out
Or get lost in all I could not see.

I felt safe with my insights
Signs of growth and health
Fully evident in light of day.
The cave came with no maps
And the tools I'd accumulated
I could not bring.

I trembled at the threshold,
Longing and resisting,
For the first time knowing truly
I could enter and everything could change.

I teetered on the brink for a time
Until other voices called my attention away.
"I'll come back when I'm ready,"
I would say.

Now I am remembering that
Almost-moment of surrender
And I cannot figure out how
To get back to the cave.

I cannot replicate what led me there.
It is found by grace.

But the *longing* has re-emerged
To step inside and move closer
To the divine indwelling beckoning.

"Let me try again," I whisper
Into the dense overgrowth
Of my untended soul.

This is the season for saying,
"Lead me again to the entrance
Of this cave..."



***What voices call you away from the threshold of surrender?
When have you teetered on the brink of transformation?
How is the Spirit inviting you to surrender into the sacred unknown?***

*Living with non-attachment but full belonging is the delicate balance of the spiritual life I do not own or control,
but I am inextricably one ~~WITH~~ invested, but not addicted.*

I.

What is all I have?
I meditate with this question.
A phrase enters the soul-
"hold all things lightly"

II.

I am always surprised and amazed
By the steady growth of the vegetable garden.
We assisted
But the growing is not ours to claim.

III.

A dog companion I love places her nose on my hand
Signaling her affection desires-
What a beautiful creature she is!
How long can I resist
Calling her *mine*?

IV.

Maybe the giving comes in the

Not holding on so tightly.

Generosity is not an occasional act
But a way of life-
Partnership without taking claim,
Appreciation without clutching.

V.

This is the grass I share with this part of the earth.
This is the house that offers us the space to invite others in.
These are the trees that drink my breath as I drink theirs.
These are the books that contain the words that cannot be contained.
This is the ground that holds me-
That goes down deeper than my imagination to the earth's core.
Where do property lines end and where do they begin?
The earth is a sphere-
All points of claim narrow toward the center
Where all meets and is one.

VI.

All I have is all that has me.
We belong to each other.

*All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions
and goods and distribute the proceed to all, as any had need. -Acts 2:44-46, NRSV*

What is *all you have*? How does "ownership" impact your spiritual life? What is the Lenten invitation to deeper belonging emerging in you?

WHAT WE NEED IS HERE.

–Wendell Berry

A Meditation.

Breathe...

Deeply... and deeper yet.

With each inhale, *What do I yearn to receive?*

With each exhale, *What do I yearn to release?*

Let this pattern of breath find a natural rhythm in you.

Allow all thoughts of striving and accumulating in you to cease, whether they be material or spiritual goods. There is nothing here to accomplish, nothing to attain...

...Just the GRACE of divine presence that has already come to say, YOU ARE ENOUGH.

Be attentive right now to what you have that *truly matters most*— a relationship of meaning, an awareness, an experience, the very earth at your feet or roof over your head. Continue breathing as you practice gratitude for what matters most in your life.

What does it mean to say, into all the realities of your life,
WHAT I NEED IS HERE.

Gently notice the hidden motivations, assumptions, and cultural expectations that keep you from this simple awareness.

What are you invited to release to make space for more **SAVORING** of what you already have that truly matters?

Continue Breathing. Rest for a time into the divine grace that holds you here, and now, in infinite and unconditional love. Amen.

Spiritual Practice: Centering Prayer

Cynthia Borgeault, in her book *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening*, describes Centering Prayer as imitating the life of Christ by exercising our “**muscle of surrender.**” It is a prayer that invites us to be present to The Presence without image, form, word, or thought. **The HEART OF THE PRAYER IS IN THE RELEASE AND RETURN;** gently release the thought that comes and return to the intention to simply BE with God.

The Practice:

Set a timer for 20 minutes. If that feels like too much at first, choose a time that will be comfortable for you as a starting place, committing to expanding that time in future prayer.

Breathe. Observe the rhythm of your breath for a while, allowing it to draw you deeper and deeper into silence. As you breathe, pay attention to one sacred word emerging within you (*God, Christ, peace, grace, hope, trust, wonder, etc.*) This word is not meant to be a mantra that you repeat as much as it is an *anchor to return you* to the intention of your prayer when your thoughts begin to wander.

Continue breathing and *being*. Exercise your “muscle of surrender” as you release the thoughts and images that come, making space for presence to the One that is with you *here and now*.

Rest in the promise that there is nothing here to achieve. The practice is about the intention to be present and the *grace* of maybe glimpsing the divine center that holds you fast.

Release, Return. Be present to divine grace.



Scriptures for Prayer and Reflection

Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to finding yourself, your true self. What kind of deal is it to get everything you want but lose yourself? What could you ever trade your soul for? –
Matthew 16:26, MSG

**He sustained him in a desert land,
in a howling wilderness waste;
he shielded him, cared for him,
guarded him as the apple of his eye.**
–Deuteronomy 32:10, NRSV

So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another. –
Ephesians 4:25, NRSV

Those who think they can do it on their own end up obsessed with measuring their own moral muscle but never get around to exercising it in real life. Those who trust God’s action in them find that God’s Spirit is in them—living and breathing God! Obsession with self in these matters is a dead end; attention to God leads us out into the open, into a spacious, free life.
–Romans 8:5-8, MSG

But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. –*Matthew 6:33, NRSV*

You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. –*Ephesians 4:22-24, NRSV*

Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering... Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what [God] wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you. –*Romans 12:1-2, MSG*

It’s quite simple: Do what is fair and just to your neighbor, be compassionate and loyal in your love, And don’t take yourself too seriously— take God seriously. –*Micah 6:8, MSG*

“He said to them, ‘Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money—not even an extra tunic.’”
Luke 9:3 NRSV

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. –*Psalms 139:23-24, NRSV*

It stands to reason, doesn’t it, that if the alive-and-present God who raised Jesus from the dead moves into your life, he’ll do the same thing in you that he did in Jesus, bringing you alive to himself? When God lives and breathes in you (and he does, as surely as he did in Jesus), you are delivered from that dead life. *Romans 8:10-11, MSG*

This is about wholeness.
This is about justice.
This is about a new way of living.
This is about embracing the Christ-way.

This is about a spirituality of RESISTING anything that tries to convince us that **MORE**

Stuff
 Effort
 Control
 Wealth
 Popularity
 Success

Can replace the longing for God inherent within.

Jesus knew this in the desert
When he uttered each sacred NO,
When he practiced the restraint
That clarified his call.

Are we too in a desert place?

What are we invited to resist and release
To get to the heart of what we truly crave?

This is about wholeness.
This is about justice.
This is about belonging.
This is about our planet.
This is about our oneness.

Listen to the gentle invitation
Signaling a different way:
LESS, LESS, LESS
Is the path to the MORE
You seek.

"Beloved Community of Christ, do not just speak and sing of Zion. Live, love, and share as Zion: those who strive to be visibly one in Christ, among whom there are no poor or oppressed.

As Christ's body, lovingly and patiently bear the weight of criticism from those who hesitate to respond to the divine vision of human worth and equality in Christ. This burden and blessing is yours for divine purposes.

***And, always remember, the way of suffering love that leads to the cross also leads to resurrection and everlasting life in Christ's eternal community of oneness and peace.
Trust in this promise."***

Doctrine and Covenants Section 165

